

BEFORE
THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
DOCKET NO. 95-773-C - ORDER NO. 95-1322✓
JUNE 29, 1995

IN RE:	Joint Application of Pond Branch) ORDER APPROVING
	Telephone Company and Ridge Telephone) MERGER AND
	Company for Approval of Merger and for) ISSUING CERTIFI-
	the Issuance of a Certificate of Public) CATE OF PUBLIC
	Convenience and Necessity.) CONVENIENCE AND
) NECESSITY

This matter comes before the Public Service Commission of South Carolina (the Commission) on the Joint Application of Pond Branch Telephone Company (Pond Branch) and Ridge Telephone Company (Ridge) (collectively referred to as Applicants) requesting approval of the merger of Ridge into Pond Branch. The Applicants request that upon approval of the merger, the Commission grant to Pond Branch, as the surviving corporation, a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to provide Local Exchange Telecommunications Service within the areas of the State of South Carolina in which Ridge is presently authorized by this Commission to operate.

On April 5, 1995, the Applicants filed with the Commission a Joint Application requesting approval of the merger of Ridge into Pond Branch. By letter dated April 18, 1995, the Commission's Executive Director instructed the Applicants to publish a prepared Notice of Filing in certain newspapers of general circulation in the area affected by the Joint Application. The Notice of Filing indicated the nature of the Joint Application and advised all

interested parties desiring to participate in the proceeding of the manner and time in which to file appropriate pleadings. A Petition to Intervene was filed by the Consumer Advocate for the State of South Carolina (the Consumer Advocate). By letter dated June 5, 1995, the Consumer Advocate informed the Commission of its desire to withdraw its Petition to Intervene, and the Commission, by Order No. 95-1207 dated June 9, 1995, granted the Consumer Advocate's withdrawal.

A public hearing was held in the offices of the Commission on June 20, 1995 at 11:00 a.m. The Honorable Rudolph Mitchell, Chairman, presided. M. John Bowen, Jr., Esquire represented the Petitioners; Florence P. Belser, Staff Counsel, represented the Commission Staff.

L. B. Spearman, Manager of Regulatory and External Affairs of Pond Branch and Ridge, appeared and offered testimony in support of the Joint Application of merger. Mr. Spearman testified that Pond Branch is a South Carolina corporation which is certificated to provide telecommunications services to 10,744 access lines in a 500 square mile area situated in Aiken, Calhoun, Lexington, and Orangeburg Counties. Mr. Spearman testified that Ridge is a South Carolina corporation which is certificated to provide telecommunications services to 1,486 access lines in a 150 square mile area situated in Aiken, Edgefield, and Saluda Counties. Mr. Spearman also stated that the two telephone exchange areas are contiguous and naturally compliment each other. According to Mr. Spearman, the purpose of the merger is to consolidate administrative functions and to recognize cost savings which would

benefit the Companies and their customers. Mr. Spearman testified that pursuant to the merger, Ridge will cease operations as a separate company and will become an exchange of Pond Branch to be referred to as "the Ridge Exchange." Mr. Spearman stated that the merger will result in a more efficient administration of local exchange service in this 650 square mile area.

Mr. Spearman further testified that the merger will not effect the customers of either company. Ridge will be served by the same personnel and will utilize the same equipment and facilities. Mr. Spearman also testified that the merger will not effect rates charged by the Companies for local exchange telephone service and that the only visible change that the subscribers of Ridge will experience will be that the name on the customers' bills will hereafter be Pond Branch Telephone Company. Mr. Spearman also offered that Pond Branch possesses the technical, financial, and managerial resources and abilities to provide local exchange, access, and intraLATA toll telecommunications services within the present Ridge service area.

Upon review of the Joint Petition and the testimony presented at the hearing and upon the applicable law, the Commission makes the following findings of facts and conclusions of law.

FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. Pond Branch and Ridge are both South Carolina corporations which are certificated by the Commission to provide local telecommunications services in their respective service areas in South Carolina.

2. The proposed merger would result in Ridge and Pond Branch

being merged into a single surviving corporation and that the surviving corporation shall be Pond Branch, which shall continue its corporative existence and continue under the name Pond Branch Telephone Company, Inc. The Commission finds that the merger will not effect the rates or services supplied to the customers of either Pond Branch or Ridge.

3. The Commission hereby finds and concludes that the merger, as set forth in the Joint Application, is in the public interest and, therefore, the Commission approves the requested merger as stated herein. The effective date of the merger shall be July 1, 1995.

4. A Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity is hereby issued to Pond Branch to serve the customers currently in the Ridge service area.

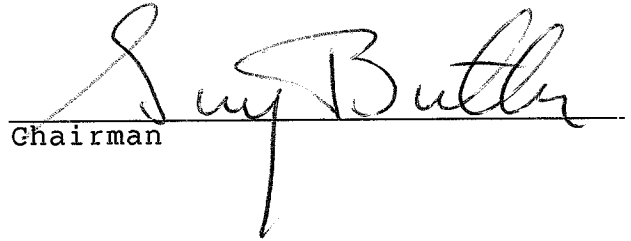
5. The Commission also requests and encourages the Federal Communications Commission (the FCC) to handle and approve the merger of Ridge and Pond Branch as expeditiously as possible.

6. This Order shall remain in full force and effect until further Order of the Commission.

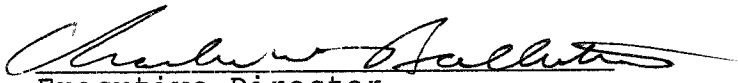
IT IS SO ORDERED.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION:

VICE Chairman

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Guy Butler", written over a horizontal line.

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles W. Sullivan", written over a horizontal line.
Executive Director

(SEAL)